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STATEMENT BY  
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MEMBER, GAITHER COMMITTEE,  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL POLICY MACHINERY  
Senator Henry M. Jackson, Chairman  
May 13, 1960

My name is John J. Corson. I am a Director of the firm of McKinsey & Company, Inc. For approximately ten years I was a Federal civil servant; throughout the last ten years I have been engaged in the practice of management consulting as Manager of the Washington Office of McKinsey & Company, Inc. During that decade I have been retained to study the operations of more than a score of Federal agencies. During this period, too, I have served with citizens advisory committees on five occasions. It is out of these experiences that I venture to respond to the questions your staff has asked that I discuss with this Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute, as best I can, to your consideration of the important problem of attracting competent leadership for the formulation and execution of national security policies.

The persistent Cold War has attached large new importance to the old problem of how to get better men to serve in key positions in the Government. Prior to World War II the failure to find able people meant less efficient services by a relatively small government. Today, failure to get and keep the ablest people in the key jobs of our Federal Government risks the devastating prospect that this country - the American people - will come off "second best" in the Cold War.

The totalitarian societies we face - Soviet Russia and Red China - have in the key posts of their governments the ablest individuals their society produces. In our kind of society imagination, enterprise, and unflagging drive are rewarded most generously in business and in the professions; in a "democratic free enterprise" society, a large proportion of the ablest people serve in commercial activities. Our long run success in the Cold War makes essential our finding improved ways of bringing and keeping a greater proportion of the ablest of our citizens into positions of leadership in the Federal Government. Experience over the past seven years in recruiting for and retaining high talent in the governmental posts where national security policies are formulated and executed demonstrates, with dangerous clarity, the difficulties our Government encounters.

1. These critically important governmental posts have been filled by a succession of able individuals who serve, on the average, two years or less. In short, the men responsible for aiding the President to formulate and carry out this Government's national security policies are a very transitory group.

2. All too often the individuals who agree to serve in this area bring to their jobs substantial competence, but little acquaintanceship with the intricate problems they must resolve.

3. The career civil servant - upon whom these political executives must rely to supply the familiarity with these problems that they lack - is often seriously handicapped. He has grown up in the department he

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represents; he is expected to support "the position" of that department. Neither his status in the department nor the breadth of experience equips him to challenge the "departmental line," to formulate new, imaginative and venturesome proposals which his political superior might accept or reject.

#### Turnover in Key National Security Posts

To demonstrate the rapidity of the succession through these key executive posts, let me specify the positions to which I refer. The "first team" for national security in our Government includes, in addition to the President and Vice President, the incumbents of eight positions. They are the: Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Secretary of the Treasury, Director of the Budget, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and Director of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization.

Upon the decisions of the incumbents of these positions, the security of this country, and in considerable part, the Free World rests. And in these eight posts, a total of 23 men have served during the Eisenhower Administration. On the average, each individual has served less than 2½ years, from the date of swearing in until resignation.

During this period three men have served as Secretary of Defense and two as Secretary of State, another two as Secretary of the Treasury and still another two as Chairman of the AEC. Four men have filled the position of Director of OCDM. In the position of Director of the Budget, four men have served, as have four others in the vital position of Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

There is, it can be said, a "second team" for national security. This group includes a total of seven vitally important additional positions. The "second team," if you will, includes these positions: Deputy Secretary of Defense, Under Secretary of State, Under Secretary of the Treasury, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Assistant Secretary of State for Policy Planning, Director of the International Cooperation Administration, and Director of the U.S. Information Administration.

In these seven positions, 27 men have served during the Eisenhower Administration. The average length of service has been less than two years.

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Some of the individuals who have served on both the first and second teams have come to their jobs with prior experience in national security affairs. The present Secretary of Defense did, as did the present Deputy Secretary. But it can be questioned if either of the previous Secretaries of Defense, and at least half of the 50 men that have occupied these posts had had experience either in the intricate, interrelated problems of international affairs, military management, intelligence operations, foreign aid, and the development of unprecedented weapons systems, or in the practical problems of getting things done within the Federal Government. Experience as a banker in Boston or even as an Assistant Secretary of the Navy simply does not provide the understanding of national security problems that is required if the individual, who is to serve only a short time, will be off to a "running start."

In his testimony before your Subcommittee some weeks ago, Mr. Robert A. Lovett, the distinguished former Secretary of Defense, said:

"It takes a long time for an able man, without previous military service of some importance and experience in government to catch up with his job in this increasing complex department. At a guess, I would say he could pay good dividends to the government in about two years. Meanwhile, of course, he is becoming a more valuable asset each day. To lose him before, or just as he becomes productive is manifestly a serious waste of the effort that went into his training."

What Mr. Lovett said as to the Department of Defense applies with even greater force to the posts that I have suggested make up the key positions in the field of national security. If we accept Mr. Lovett's conservative estimate of two years as the minimum break-in period, simple mathematics tells us that the Government has a practical personnel problem in the national security field.

#### Experience in Relation to Problems

My second point highlights the basic scarcity in this country of individuals with the large executive talents required, with the qualities essential for political leadership, and with an understanding of national security affairs.

Some men can be found who have acquired in business, experience especially relevant to the jobs they go into, e.g., as Assistant Secretary of Supply in a military service or as head of an industry division in the Department of Commerce. But few Presidential appointees bring to these jobs, in addition to substantial personal talents - and surely I

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am not questioning their large abilities - real experience in the complex problems this country faces in the field of national security and a knowledge of what it takes to operate effectively in Government in Washington.\*

My observations from the sidelines over a score of years convince me that a majority of business executives are both uncomfortable and unsuccessful in top level policy-making posts. There are many exceptions to this generalization; you know of businessmen such as Marion Folsom who have been outstandingly successful. But generally, they are unaccustomed to, and sometimes resentful of, the interest of the legislative branch in administrative affairs. They are unfamiliar with the necessity for clearance and coordination with numerous other departments. They are irritated by public scrutiny of their actions and by the rigid controls exercised over the recruitment of personnel, the budgeting of funds, and the procurement of supplies and equipment. In many instances, the

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\* The Task Force Report on Personnel and Civil Service of the Second Hoover Commission supports this view. The report states (p. 40):

"1. The combination of abilities required is relatively rare. At the topmost level these men require both well-developed executive ability and well-developed qualities of political leadership. That is, a man must be able to direct, control, and even inspire a large organization which has formidable functions, and he must also be able publicly to discuss the Government's business with Congress, interested parties, and the public in a way that makes simply very complex matters, meets hostility (foreign as well as domestic) and wins confidence. He must make decisions on matters of great importance for the future as well as the present welfare of the country. His foresight must equal the hindsight of a host of critics, both amateur and professional, who are free to be as narrow in their point of view and time perspective as they care to be. The rules of the game of national politics allow no margin for error, and the American political world has not yet perceived the point that 'magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom.' To lead the life of a political executive of high rank amidst the asperities of American politics is a test of toughness, of intelligence, and of devotion to the public interest."

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recruitment of outstanding business executives for these posts is both unfair to the individual and of little advantage to the executive branch.\*

When placed in a post in the national security field, the individual's newness to Government is multiplied by the uniqueness and complex interrelatedness of the problems that arise in assuring the security of this country or of our allies.

### The Capacities of Career Men

It is often said that the top career civil servants provide the experience and continuity to compensate for the "here today, gone tomorrow" Presidential appointee. There is much of truth in this statement. The top career servants in the Federal Government are able and too-little-appreciated men. But they can only substitute for the political executive in the most limited sense. The latter remains the key source of administrative leadership, the Presidential representative with the responsibility for governing. Secondly, we must recognize that the career civil servant has been bred from within, and his experience, over a period of years, is often confined to one department or agency. Such experience tends to imbue him with a departmental viewpoint and to entrap him within a narrow perspective.

The large majority of these men and women are able, conscientious public servants, but existing means for broadening their skills and their perspectives are entirely too limited. Such understanding as they have of complicated problems of public policy, of the interrelationships

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\* Writing in the early days of the Eisenhower Administration, Robert Bradford, a distinguished corporate attorney in Boston and one time Governor of Massachusetts, noted that:

"...business executives, taking over important government posts, are finding, as the professors found before them in the early days of the New Deal, that success in politics is an art which draws on qualities not necessarily to be applauded or even desirable in the classroom or the industrial plant. The element of compromise plays a highly important part in political decisions, as does the balancing of interests and the necessity of persuading others to agree with your point of view rather than cramming your decisions down their throat. With the best of intentions and with the highest degree of efficiency, a government cannot be run like a business, nor should it be."

Harvard Business Review, November-December, 1953, pp. 33-41.

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between the vast complex of government activities, of the impact of their decisions on others, they have acquired on their own initiative. As an employer, the Federal Government does too little to broaden the career man's viewpoint and his experience.

Nowhere is this problem better illustrated than in the State and Defense Departments. The career man with a rounded understanding of foreign political affairs, of intelligence operations, of military management, and of economic development, and of the relationship between all four is altogether too rare.

#### Possible Solutions

Your Subcommittee has already suggested a number of possible solutions to the problems I have discussed. Let me suggest three or four points where, in my opinion, some action is needed.

1. We must discard our informal, haphazard system of recruiting top political executives. The responsibility is now divided between the White House and department heads on a most informal basis. Under existing practice, if any attempt is made to search out the right man for the job on a systematic basis, this is an exception to the general rule of leaving it to chance. A central recruiting office of some sort, preferably tied to the Executive Office of the President, seems a necessity if we are to be more successful in getting into Government abler people for critically important jobs.

2. We must find ways of acquainting outstandingly capable men in business, in the universities and elsewhere with the problems of national security and thus building up a reservoir to which Government can turn. Service on advisory boards or commissions serves to provide a few of the needed introductions to these critical problems. Active participation in private groups like the Committee for Economic Development or the Council on Foreign Relations supplies some understanding to others. But more is needed - and I urge consideration of how we can acquaint more of our ablest citizens with the se problems.

3. We must develop the kind of career service that will produce more broadly-trained career executives. The proposal for a Joint Career Service between State and Defense set forth in your interim report is a step in the right direction. In my view, the concept of interchanging career personnel between departments to vary their experience and broaden their viewpoints must be carried still further.

4. We must accept frankly and fully the necessity of utilizing as executives in key jobs men drawn temporarily from industry who will continue to be compensated by their private employers. I make this